

THE IRISH QUESTION:

WHAT IT HAS BEEN, WHAT IT IS, AND HOW TO DEAL
WITH IT.

BY C. BRADLAUGH.

ANY long continuance in the future of the present terrible condition of affairs in Ireland, disastrous alike to morality, commerce, and industry throughout Great Britain, is impossible; yet how is any good change to be produced? An attempt to check the spread of disaffection by the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act in Ireland has, after two years' trial, and after innumerable arrests, proved an utter failure, and indeed appears rather to have aggravated the deep-seated and widespread spirit of discontent, and to have given more vigour to the secret conspiracy ordinarily spoken of as the Fenian movement. Four courses have been prominently suggested in various journals or by public speakers as presenting some fair prospect of solution for the Irish difficulty. I will first state these four courses without remark, and, after roughly sketching the Irish position, then examine and express my opinion on each.

1. The separation of Ireland from England, with a vote of the people as to the form of their new government.

2. The "stamping out" the rebellious spirit in an absolute and arbitrary fashion, as announced by Sir J. Pakington at Droitwich, and as advocated in many of the journals and some of the magazines.

3. The issue of a commission, acting immediately and continuously, armed with the most extensive powers of amnesty for all liable to prosecution for treason, treason-felony, or kindred offence, and directed to inquire into the alleged grievances of the Irish people, with a distinct and solemn pledge from the sovereign—to be endorsed in the most formal manner by the leaders of the Government and opposition in both houses—to the effect that immediate steps should be taken for the redressal of all actual and *bona fide* grievances.

4. The giving to Ireland such political enfranchisement or separate legislature as has been recently conceded by the Cabinet of Vienna to the people of Hungary, or such an independent legislature as that claimed by Daniel O'Connell.

Before dealing with all or any of these propositions, I desire to establish in the minds of the readers the conviction that there is at the present moment the most extensive dis-

content and very considerable disloyalty to the British Government prevalent amongst the Irish people, and that the discontent was not originated by, and is not confined to, the members of the Fenian Brotherhood, and is sufficiently wide-spread to be very dangerous to the British Monarchy, unless at once dealt with; and I wish especially to contradict the notion that the present rebellious movement is mainly or entirely an importation from America. That native Irish republicanism recently re-imported from America has given a certain character in Leinster, Munster, and Connaught to the protest of discontent, is true, but that America initiated the revolutionary movement is, I believe, the reverse of the actual facts.

It is necessary that the English should understand whether or not the large majority of their fellow subjects in Ireland are discontented, and if it be true that they are so, then it is also requisite that the English should know what reasons, if any, exist for such discontent, as without a proper certainty on both these points there is undoubtedly a general disposition on the part of my countrymen to leave the settlement of political questions, and the dealing with political crises in the hands of the holders for the time being of executive power, and I believe that the case is so grave, that if the present executive do not or cannot properly deal with it, the Nation must take the matter up. Now first I assert that there is, and more or less for the last sixty years has been, a spirit of discontent permeating the mass of the people from the South of Cork to the North of Londonderry, from the westernmost point of Clare, to the eastern Kildare coast. That this assertion is true, will be manifest when the various state prosecutions during that period for treason, treason-felony, and sedition are remembered and examined, and when it is also recollected how the natives have fled in thousands from the soil of their birth, risking the perils and fatigues of a long ocean voyage to seek the means of existence in a foreign land, which at home they found it impossible to obtain. That this discontent has continuously existed in fact, although the forms of its expression may have been sometimes modified, is made clear when you think that the cry of "Justice for Ireland" has been so often repeated during the last half century, that our governing classes have treated it as a wearisome nuisance to be avoided, rather than as an appeal to be listened to,

examined, and satisfied. In truth there are few who deny the discontent of Irishmen, but there are many who doubt the reality of their grievances. They allege that the Irish are a dissatisfied and impracticable people, with whom no good can be done, and whose condition no legislation however wise can permanently improve. This view is sustained by several of the leading English journals, from whom we might hope better things. As to the character of the Irish people, the evidence taken by the Colonisation Committees fully demonstrates that once free from the demoralising and degrading influences which surround him in his native country, the Irishman in Australia, Canada, or America, rapidly improves; he exhibits after two or three years' residence abroad, a self-reliant energy, habits of active industry, desire and capability for the acquisition of capital, and an open, frank character, utterly at variance with his previous habits. Coupled with this change, he manifests a strong attachment to, and yearning for those whom he has left in old Erin, and the post office bears numerous and weighty tokens that his regard for the old country is a generous and fruitful feeling.

The Irishman in Ireland is discontented and disaffected, not from any special impracticability or default in his nature; but from the heavy grievances under which he actually labours, added to a legacy of the consequences of poverty bequeathed by his ancestors, with the memory of wrongs inflicted on them, and some of which still seriously affect his condition.

The present Chancellor of the Exchequer, who can hardly be suspected of a wish to highly colour the picture, has stated that "there are grievances existing in Ireland which in any other country would be redressed by revolution," and that "they would be so redressed in Ireland if the overwhelming power of England did not prevent it." Twenty years ago the Irish difficulty, which at that time involved a rebellious organisation less powerful and more attackable than Fenianism, was admitted by Lord Clarendon's government to arise out of a complication of evils and abuses of many origins, dates, and characters. Two heads may be selected as representing the whole of the Irish grievances, for any honest endeavour to deal with these chief grievances would necessarily involve very extraordinary changes in the condition of the Irish people. These are the Irish Church

27

Question, and with it the government-sustained hostility of Protestant against Catholic, and the question of Irish Land tenure, involving the social and political relations between the owners and cultivators of the soil.

To get a fair view of the Irish Church Question, it is enough to say that it was originally forced upon the unwilling nation by mere force of executive authority ; that while in the three great provinces, thirty-seven out of every forty are Roman Catholics, yet the Protestant Church is the State Church, to the support of which they are compelled to contribute. It is also the fact that an oppressive system has been pursued (by a magistrature friendly to the Protestant tithe collector, and hostile to the Catholic peasant ratepayer,) of enforcing the ecclesiastical exactions of the hostile and dominant religious institution. Nor as a body have the Protestant clergy made any efforts to win the love of those whom they compelled to pay tithe. The Irish State Church like an unhealthy leech, has gorged itself with the nation's vitality, rendering no service in return. For very many years the statute law of Ireland placed the Roman Catholic portion of the population in a position of disability. All sorts of annoyances, petty and grave, were legally inflicted upon the mass of the nation by the minority, who constituted the ruling church, supported by the armed authority of the Government ; and although it is true that nearly the whole of the Roman Catholic disabilities have been repealed, yet until recently a course of conduct has been maintained by the Protestant Magistrature which has produced the conviction in the mind of the Roman Catholic Irish peasant that the administration of justice was not even-handed, and that in any questions in which the religious element was at all involved, and which came for decision before an ordinary bench of magistrates, the Roman Catholic might reckon on a strict enforcement against him of all penalties contained in the statute book, while his Protestant co-delinquent was dealt as gently with as the spoiled child of the family. This has been most glaringly manifested in some of the Orange riots, and subsequent prosecutions. This religious disability so far as it affects the holding of land has been most certainly formally repealed, but anyone aware that the largest portion of Irish estates is held by Protestant proprietors, will probably be also aware that in the letting of farms at the present day an undue and improper preference is given to the Protestant

28

candidate. It is worthy notice that the present republican movement in Ireland is not a Roman Catholic movement; naturally the bulk of those engaged are Roman Catholics, for the large majority of Irishmen belong to that Church, but the organization of to-day is one which combats alike the Church and the Throne, if it finds these institutions opposed to national liberty.

The Irish Church grievance, vast as it is, sinks however into comparative insignificance when the question of land tenure is gravely examined. The land question in Ireland is a topic of necessity for the Irishman, he has little or no choice. In Ireland there is no Manchester, no Birmingham, no Sheffield, no grand iron centre, no extensively worked coalfields—the support of the great body of the people is and must continue to be derived from or in connection with the cultivation of the soil and the production of food. The agricultural population of Ireland is proportionally to the other members of the community, enormously in excess of the agriculturists of Great Britain. Yet it is alleged by the Irishman that the land tenure of Ireland is and has been of a most demoralising and depressing character, destroying the independence of the cultivator, and dooming him either to compulsory exile from the land of his birth or to semi-barbarism and wretchedness at home.

In a brief essay like the present, it is impossible to discuss effectively questions of tenant right and land cultivation; it is only possible to point them out for the reader's examination. Politicians and statesmen of the most varied shades of opinion have from time to time admitted that there was something grievously wrong in the land system. Committees of both houses have taken evidence and made reports, but all refrain from attempting to deal with the question *au fond*, though partial endeavours, such as the Encumbered Estates Act, have been made to check some of the aggravated mischief. So long, however, as the laws of primogeniture and entail remain the same, so long will it be impossible to effect any general and substantial improvement in the condition of the people, so long will both landed proprietor and tenant cultivator remain comparatively powerless for permanent good. "The grand evil in Ireland is this,—that the Irish people, the nation, are dispossessed of the soil"—so has declared one of our most eloquent advocates of popular rights and yet the land grievance itself is but partially recognised amongst Englishmen.


29

Some say that the land tenure of Ireland is of the same nature as that of Great Britain, and that no grievance can be urged for the people of the one country which would not apply with equal force to the inhabitants of England, Scotland, and Wales. In the first place there is always the vital difference that the mass of the people in Ireland are compelled to follow agriculture, while throughout Great Britain they have many other occupations by the pursuit of which they may obtain a livelihood. Then in England as a rule the tenants are capitalists, farming for profit; but in Ireland the tenants are labourers, farming for subsistence. The Irishman generally cultivates his land in the hope of obtaining subsistence, comparatively seldom in the hope of amassing capital. The rents exacted in Ireland by the proprietors, and agreed to be paid by the tenant cultivators, have been unfair and excessive, and have therefore been mostly in arrear; the tenant labourer in consequence losing all political dignity and independence as against his landlord. The large exodus of the Irish people during the last twenty years has of course lessened the sharp competition for land arising from a crowded population, and has thus partially diminished the rent evil; but unfortunately the exodus has been of the manhood and flower of the nation; and wretched and weak, decrepit and maimed, remain to struggle for life. In England suitable farm-buildings and general improvements are provided by or at the cost of the landowner; in Ireland they are usually provided by the tenant, who being only a tenant from year to year has no interest in permanently improving the farm for which a higher rent would be demanded the moment he had given it a higher value. The overwhelming majority of Irish agriculturists are tenants at will—a very small per centage having leases, and thus the great body of the cultivators of the soil may be evicted at a six months' notice; with the additional difference that in England the landlord professes a good feeling towards his tenant which is more or less reciprocated, while in Ireland the landowners as a class are regarded with dislike and suspicion, and as a class have exhibited but little sympathy with the unfortunate tillers of the soil. The system of entail so prevalent in Ireland is an obstacle of considerable magnitude to any general leasings. The Land Question of Ireland has been so effectively and exhaustively treated by my friend G. R. that I refer the reader to his able pamphlet for a full examination of the various bearings of the question.

30

Dealing with the first point suggested in this essay, I am against any separation of Ireland from England, in the sense of constituting Ireland a distinct and separate government, and this on the ground of its present utter impracticability. A new monarchy beside us, and formed out of a portion of Great Britain, would be an impossibility, if England is to retain her place amongst the great powers of Europe; and of late years her right to foremost rank amongst nations has been so strongly questioned, that rightly or wrongly the governing classes would resist at all costs any alienation of part of the British Islands: and as to a republic, I am against the present establishment of a republic in Ireland, because although I regard republicanism as the best form of government possible, I nevertheless think that the people of England and of Ireland are yet too much wanting in true dignity and independence, and too ignorant of their political rights and duties, to at present make good republicans. We are growing gradually towards the point of republican government; but it is not I think the question of to-day. A forcible separation of Ireland from England would not unnaturally be resisted by the latter to her last drop of blood and treasure, and I do not believe that the Irish republican party are either strong enough, or sufficiently united to give even a colour of probability to the supposition of a successful revolution. I will not discuss the possibility of Ireland's self-maintenance as a separate government, because I feel convinced that the mere proposition is so utterly distasteful to the whole of the British people (always excepting the Irish republicans) as to preclude the possibility of any immediate solution of the Irish question by this means, and it is only to the immediate solution I desire to address myself here. I know that the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which contains in its ranks many thoughtful, earnest, and honest men, declares that it will never rest satisfied with a continuance of British Rule, and I am aware that there is amongst the mass of the ignorant peasantry, a strong feeling of a similar character. But, as I believe this feeling in the case of the ignorant mass to be the outgrowth and result of generations of misgovernment, I trust and hope that it may be checked and changed by the adoption of another and more humane course of conduct in Irish legislation.

The intelligent Irish republicans ground their claim to establish a new government in Ireland, not only on the



sovereign and indisputable right of a people to choose its own form of government and to change it ; but also on the fact that the government of England has from time to time refused or neglected to redress Irish wrongs, and has disregarded, and in fact treated with contempt many appeals made to it from the Irish nation. Our republican friends must recollect that with the election of a reformed parliament, we shall have a legislative assembly of a far different character, and the possibility of governments no longer formed from a circle limited by one or two families. While admitting the full force of all the objections urged against the vice-regal government, while agreeing that the misgovernment of Ireland has been of a most shameful and mischievous character, I do not believe that the attempt to effect a separation of Ireland from British dominion would be likely to bring about a speedy termination of Ireland's miseries, or to secure her permanent happiness.

The second course, "the stamping out," appears to be the favourite remedy for the cure of Ireland's ills amongst a numerous class. Certain journals advocate it ; we are to have no more "rosewater leniency ;" all treason and sedition is to be severely punished, and all sympathy with unfortunate Ireland is to be treated as treason or sedition. Society has been seized with a fit of terror, deerstalker hats, square toed boots, and slightly bearded chins, are *prima facie* evidences of treasonable proclivities. Society is afraid, and, being cowardly, is inclined to be cruel—a blackbordered journal must be prosecuted to illustrate our liberty of the press. Those who took part in the funeral processions are to be indicted to exemplify our great right of meeting. But there are several difficulties attending the "stamping out" process. To be effective *it must mean the entire extermination of the Irish race* ; are the admirers of law and order prepared to go this length ? Their predecessors tried it and failed, nay, they not only failed to exterminate the Irish people, but succeeded in implanting a bitter feeling of hatred, which, descending from father to son, still rankles in the minds of the Irish peasant. For centuries the English race tried to kill out the Irish ; statutes were passed forbidding marriages with the Irish enemy, forbidding the fostering of Irish children, forbidding commerce with the Irish, forbidding the native Irish from fishing on their own shores. Civilisation rebuked this brutality, and step

by step the "stamping out" process was given up. Is it possible to renew it in the middle of the nineteenth century? Surely no. If you could not stamp out the Irish feeling when there was no press to record the myriads murdered, the cities plundered, and the wretched habitations dismantled, still less can you do it to-day. If you could not "stamp out" the Irish aspiration when you held all the Irish race within the narrow limits of Erin's sea-washed boundaries, how can you do it now, when her wailing cry for help would bring echoes from across the Atlantic, the merest whisper of which would make our rich shippers pale with the remembrance of the Alabama exploits, and the vision of a probable repetition as vengeance for connivance at wrong. "Stamping out" must be given up as impossible; nay, not only as impossible, but as inhuman. If you had the power you have not the right. The whole world would cry shame on you if you repeated the infamous brutalities perpetrated by the loyal scoundrels of 1798.

I may be met with the cry of "Fenian outrages which call for severe and repressive measures." Permit me to enquire a little into these outrages, so-called Fenian. Where have they taken place? The Manchester rescue was no outrage, nor if we had been discussing it as the rescue of Langiewicz from the hands of the Russian authorities whom he was attempting to overthrow—or as the rescue of Maximilian from the hands of the Mexican Republicans, on whom he had sought to trample—or as the rescue of Garibaldi from Alessandria—or as the rescue of John Brown from American supporters of their then law—should we in any of these cases have called the rescue an outrage, or should we have denounced the incidental killing of the gaoler as murder. The rescue of Kelly and Deasy was a political offence, and no features of aggravated cruelty on the part of the rescuing party were alleged against them. That poor Brett lost his life was a deplorable incident, and justice is red-handed with her Shylock-like vengeance for this unjustifiable homicide.

That the Clerkenwell explosion was an outrage I agree, but that it was a Fenian outrage in the sense of being ordered by the Fenian chiefs I do not believe, nor do I think that any large number of Fenians endorsed it with approval, nor am I at all sure that it was planned and executed by individual Fenians in the interests of Fenianism. Assuming that the printed protest published by the press was really issued by


the Committee of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, that body took the earliest moment of repudiating all connection with the reckless and cruel crime. If the parties who indirectly contributed the most to that outrage are to be fixed with the shame, disgrace, and penalty of having a name associated with it, I am not sure that the "informer-encouraged outrage" might not be a phrase as justifiable as the Fenian outrage. I remember to have read how plain Mr. Mayne by his paid *protégé* Popay thirty years ago tried to make political agitators into armed perpetrators of treasonable outrages, and the more I read the evidence relating to the explosion the more curious appears the whole of the previous police acquaintance with it.

It may, and probably will, be urged by the supporters of the Government, that the "stamping out" process is not to be directed against the whole Irish race, but only against that portion of the Irish community enrolled in or aiding the actual Fenian Brotherhood. Now what is this Fenian Brotherhood, so far as we have the means of judging it? An association, chiefly a secret one, for the establishment by force of an Irish Republic. I propose to inquire, before I discuss whether or not this Fenian society ought to be "stamped out," why it exists at all? why it exists as a secret society? why it appeals to force in lieu of appealing to reason? why it seeks to overthrow the rule of the British Monarchy in Ireland? Why does Fenianism exist at all? It exists because it is the personification of the protest from that Irish misery which in sixteen years has seen nearly two millions of the most able-bodied amongst the Irish peasantry fly from Ireland in despair; of that mighty misery which has witnessed for the last twenty years the virile population gradually decreasing, while those physically incapable of labour, as lame, blind, deaf and dumb, &c., have been rapidly increasing. Of that despairing misery which has watched while the cultivation of corn land has lessened year by year, which has in its wretchedness counted the diminished potato crops without power to stay the decrease; which has seen the cattle grow less and less, as each summer's sun passed away, and which, while agricultural civilisation made rapid strides in Europe, has seen the uncultivated land of the Green Isle augment by thousands of acres.

But why does this associated protest of Irish discontent exist as a secret society, why not as an open agitation? For

34

answer I refer the reader to the speech of Mr. Whiteside, Q.C., who defended Charles Gavan Duffy, proprietor of the *Nation*, and one of the co-traversers with Daniel O'Connell. That gentleman is now a judge sitting to try and sentence conspirators. Daniel O'Connell had conducted an open and perfectly peaceful agitation, during the progress of which he had addressed enormous mass meetings at Loughrea, Baltinglass, Clontibret, Tullamore, Lismore, Longford, Mallow, Tara, Clifden, Mullaghmast, and other places. According to the evidence of the Government witnesses the numbers at these meetings were from 4 or 5,000 at the smallest, to 250,000 at the lowest calculation at the largest, making a good million at the whole. Not a single instance of riot, rough language, or assault was alleged in connection with any of such meetings. They were declarations of the people in favour of repeal; declarations of great weight from the magnitude of the assemblages, but all perfectly orderly and peaceful, all professing loyalty to the Queen. When the Government took upon itself to prohibit the great Clontarf meeting, Daniel O'Connell used his undoubted vast influence to ensure compliance with the Government proclamation, which indeed he might have utterly disregarded, as I disregarded the proclamation of Spencer Walpole. Despite this pacific disposition, the Government determined to put an end to the repeal agitation, and it did so by prosecuting the chiefs of the movement. In the course of a most able and eloquent defence, Mr. Whiteside, who spoke highly of the utility of free and open political discussion, cautioned the Government that gagging the agitation would render it more dangerous, and so it has. Daniel O'Connell himself entreated the court and jury "to dismiss with honest and zealous indignation the attempt of the Government to prevent the millions from seeking peaceably and quietly the amelioration of existing institutions." He said, "do not take away the legitimate mode of effecting useful purposes by public meetings speaking bold truths, boldly and firmly. Do not drive men into concealment, do not send them back into conspiracy." When the Government forbade open and orderly meetings held in the open fields, they provoked the formation of secret associations meeting in back streets; and it is to such ill-advised state prosecutions as that directed against the open agitation of Daniel O'Connell and his co-workers that we owe the present widely-extended




and firmly-rooted secret association founded and framed by James Stephens. The suppression of open agitation 20 years ago commenced the organisation in secret, and the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act has added to the number and efficiency of the Fenian Association. But why does Fenianism appeal to force? Is it not because they allege that the British Government has year after year refused to listen to reason? Is it not because by successive governments empty promise after empty promise has, as they state, been made of attempt at redressal of Ireland's grievances, and all these have been broken? I do not justify this appeal to arms. Undoubtedly an Englishman or Irishman while he may encourage to-day a Pole, Hungarian, or Italian to armed rebellion, and while he may admire Hampden, Milton, Tell, Masaniello, and George Washington, ought at home to submit to any grievance, and bend the neck to any yoke. But these Fenians are, in the mass, poor, ignorant, rough men, and it is the highly educated English class mis-government which, perpetuating their poverty, has perpetuated their ignorance and their roughness. Can you wonder then that they make a mistake, and adopting the manners of their governors, rely rather on the pike than the pen? It is you, the governing classes, who have set the Irish race the bad example of the appeal to force. You have ruled them by force. Cavalry, artillery, and infantry, aided by armed constabulary, garrisoning the country, and prominent at its elections and public gatherings, have compelled fear in the Irish nation, whom you never tried to indoctrinate with love. The seditious agitator, Daniel O'Connell, taught that "the most desirable of all political ameliorations were purchased at too dear a price if obtained at the cost of one drop of human blood," yet Daniel O'Connell was prosecuted for treasonable conspiracy. I do not quite hold the extreme pacific views of Daniel O'Connell, but I do not believe that a successful and useful revolution can now be made unless it be almost entirely a mental one. I do not believe in an enduring revolution to be effected by revolvers in this 19th century; but the Fenians only copy the bad example of the appeal to force which is given by constituted governments in their ever-recurring wars. I do not believe in a lasting republic to be formed by pike aid—the pen and printing press best teach the littleness of kings; but neither do I believe in the mad and bloody cry for vengeance raised by a

36

cowardly section of the aristocracy and a timid-hearted *bourgeoisie* against an unfortunate people, and if "stamping out" were seriously preached or really attempted to be practised, I would be one to see how soon national physical strength could be made available to annihilate merciless class weakness. We must have no wicked war of races to aggravate Ireland's misery. It must be union of the whole British people to have real justice done.

Rejecting, therefore, the first and second courses as each impracticable and objectionable, the third and fourth remain.

Those who have contended for a separate legislative assembly for Ireland, number in their ranks some very thoughtful writers, some able politicians, and some men of extraordinary genius. If the reader is only here reminded of Charles James Fox, Grattan, Saurin, Chief Justice Bushe, Lord Chancellor Plunket, Daniel O'Connell, and Goldwin Smith, it is because a mere lengthy muster roll of names can hardly add force to the argument. William Pitt, most active in promoting the Union, had himself admitted that "the uniform policy of England has been to deprive Ireland of the use of her own resources, and to make her subservient to the interests and opulence of the English people." An Irish Parliament is asked for by repealers as best fitted to deal with the complicated Irish questions, all of which need speciality of knowledge, interest, and application. It is asked for on the ground taken by Hungary—namely, the restoration of the national sovereignty. The nominal monarch would be the same, but the Irish would really govern themselves. They would make their own laws, as do the Australians, the Canadians, and other British Dependencies subject to the monarchical jurisdiction, but otherwise independently legislating. Charles James Fox stated in reference to Ireland a proposition which has more recently been repeated by Earl Russell as to Poland and Italy, *i.e.*, that a people have the inalienable right of selecting their own governors. Mr. Fox declared that "so far was he from thinking that Great Britain had a right to govern Ireland if she did not choose to be governed by us, that he maintained that no country that ever had existed or did exist, had a right to hold the sovereignty of another against the will and consent of that other." It is alleged by those who seek to obtain a repeal of the Act of Union that its



passing was obtained by a mingled process of terrorism and corruption. Between four and five millions of the public money were, it is stated, expended in influencing votes, besides the grossest traffic in offices, from the highest in the church to the lowest in the revenue service. It is alleged that the liability of England, £446,000,000 as against £21,000,000 then owing by Ireland, was too disproportionate for fair union. It is urged that promises were made to induce the Union, which promises have been utterly broken, in spirit and in letter, that Ireland was not to be charged with the principal or interest of the first named enormous sum, except in certain contingencies which have never yet arisen. It is declared that for some few years after the Union the Imperial Parliament seriously and unjustifiably increased the nominal amount of Irish taxation, and although this course was relinquished as unproductive and impracticable from the utter inability of the people to comply with the demands made upon them, a nominal increase of £4,000,000 taxation actually resulting in £500,000 less revenue, it nevertheless had the disastrous effect of still more firmly convincing the Irish peasant that the policy of English legislation was opposed to Irish happiness. Those who entirely dispute the Act of Union adopt the argument that the then Irish legislature had no power to concur in such a measure. The people had delegated to their representatives the right and duty of legislation, but they had not delegated the power of transferring such rights and duties to a body appointed in an entirely different manner. It is argued that the legislatures of themselves had just as much right, and no more, to pass the Act of Union, as Queen Victoria and Louis Napoleon would have *of themselves* to concur in a general Union of the British and French dominions: Whether or no, a purely Irish Parliament sitting in Dublin could be elected with the present suffrage capable of dealing fairly and ably with the existing evils of that unhappy country, is a question upon which I do not feel competent to express an opinion. Whether, considering the long period which has passed since the Union, the reformed imperial legislature—elected from Ireland, so far as Irish representatives are concerned, by the wider suffrage just granted in England—would now be prepared and willing to address itself boldly and honestly to the task of removing the causes of discontent, is more

38

than I can venture to declare, although I confess I have great hope that the next Parliament will be sufficiently national to end the miseries resulting from class-misgovernment.

The third course above suggested is one which I should be glad to see fairly examined. To be useful, any commission should be issued forthwith, and contain in its list of members some of the best men in position, honesty, and intelligence of each Island: it need not be limited to members of Parliament—one English judge and one Irish judge, each as free as possible from party bias, ought to be upon it. At the opening of Parliament the Queen's Speech might contain the royal pledge, and as, alas, the performance of royal promises have been too often hindered by Ministerial changes or Parliamentary difficulties, a serious engagement on the part of the chief statesmen on each side of the Lords and Commons would afford some probability to Ireland's children that her woes would be really examined without delay, and immediate measures for their redressal carried without evasion. Whether or not the present Parliament (self-admittedly no longer sufficiently representing the national spirit) is entitled to legislate for Ireland I doubt. It would certainly only legislate effectively under pressure from without, while a new Parliament might be returned with its members pledged from the hustings to deal vigorously and honestly with the question. The only objection to the matter remaining for the new Parliament is that it involves at least twelve months' delay, with the whole country in a most critical state. One rash step on either side may provoke incalculable mischief. I plead to both sides for forbearance, for mercy, for humanity. I plead to the present Government, and to the present governing class who hold in their hands the military power of the nation, and I ask them what good do all the troops do now, and what good have they done to Ireland? Barracks, bogs, and beggars are the plague spots marking her social sickness. If you cannot rule by love, you ought not to rule by force; to gain confidence show confidence. Renew the Habeas Corpus Act, restore the right of meeting, appeal to the citizens of Ireland to assemble on the open plains and state their griefs; if the agitators are a few strangers they will soon stand self-exposed. If all Ireland be discontented you have no right to gag its discontent.

59

To the Irish Republican party also I appeal, to its leaders chiefly, and to them I say—in your hands now rests the fate of many hundreds of poor and ignorant who will be guided by you, and I plead to you to repress all violence, to check all physical vengeance. It is only the weak who dare be cruel. Teach your opponents that the sufferers are stronger than the oppressors. I do not ask you to present your cheek to be smitten, but I do entreat you not to be the first to raise the hand to strike. Do not let passion and ambition hurry you into an armed conflict in which you are overweighted and outnumbered, and in which the families of the poor peasantry who join you suffer more than you do. Be not too wide in your demands, ask life and the right to live for yourselves and your countrymen, but do not yet challenge the old and crumbling dynasty to fight, or die. You cannot expect it to commit suicide, and your weapons are not enough to fight it successfully. Republicanism is the hope of the future; but we must deal with the reality of the present, and for the present we cannot do otherwise than ask for the enactment of such measures as shall give the land of Ireland on reasonable conditions to the tillers of the soil, and which shall release the nation from the burden of a State Church with which it has no sympathy. Ask this, and the people will support you. Ask this, and England will join you. Ask this, and class interest dare not refuse you; or, should it dare, and should it resort to force to trample on right, then you shall find our sympathy no empty word, and to our action no futile pretence. The subject is too grave for threatenings, too sad for bombast, we are too near a fratricidal struggle. On behalf of Erin, wan, weary, and wretched, I plead to those who wield England's Executive power to remember that exacting fierce legal vengeance for rebellion and sedition brings a halo of sanctity to the deeds of the punished, and shame to the memory of the executioner. And I write in hope that the plea of "Justice for Ireland" will not be addressed in vain, and that the aristocracy which boasts its high culture will show its true humanity and throw open the long closed flood-gates of life to the despairing children of Erin

PRICE TWOPENCE.